

Remarks
Chargé d’Affaires Thomas Pierce
Launching of the TELL Campaign
November 19, 2012, 10:00a.m.
Regency Suites, Hadfield Street

First Lady Deolatchmee Ramotar
Honorable Minister Webster
Honorable Minister Manickchand
Dr. Suleiman Braimoh, UNICEF Representative to Guyana and
Suriname
Members of Diplomatic community
NGO Representatives
Members of the Media
And other invited guests

I am very pleased to join you here today at the launch of the TELL Campaign to empower children to disclose any form of sexual violence; and to raise awareness and discuss how to prevent and respond to violence. It is important to bring attention to this issue and to give it the high priority it merits -- to prevent occurrences, to assist and protect victims, and to prosecute offenders.

It is encouraging to see the government continuing to engage with international organizations and civil society groups to build awareness of

the affront to human rights posed by domestic violence and violence against women and children, including sexual violence.

The TELL Campaign adds to the many visible efforts to confront this issue, including the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act and the Sexual Offences Act; the establishment of the Men's Affairs Bureau and the Domestic Violence Policy Unit; provision of support services for victims of violence; and increasing public awareness.

Exposure to domestic violence puts our young men and women in danger of long-term physical, psychological, and emotional harm. Children who experience domestic and sexual violence are at a higher risk for failure in school, emotional disorders, and substance abuse, and are more likely to perpetuate the cycle of violence themselves later in life.

Domestic and sexual violence disproportionately impact girls, and prevention and response to violence – particularly against women and

girls -- is one of Secretary of State Clinton's priorities and is of vital importance to the interests and overall foreign policy of the United States, as we work to promote greater social and economic inclusion. As Secretary Clinton has emphasized repeatedly, women drive economic growth, women's education is linked to increased national income and improved health, and women are essential agents of change in peace building and conflict resolution.

Conversely, violence against women and girls, and the social stigma of violence, negatively affect the ability of women and girls to participate fully in and contribute to their communities, whether it is economically, politically, and/or socially.

The United States strongly supports efforts worldwide to combat all forms of domestic violence by speaking out on this issue, building awareness, and helping those who are taking action.

And, we are committed to working with the Government of Guyana, international organizations, and civil society groups to support the many and varied efforts to combat domestic violence. For example:

Last January, the Embassy actively participated in the WITNESS Project – a grassroots campaign to build awareness on domestic violence. Launched by the U.S.-based Margaret Clemons Foundation, the WITNESS Project engaged talented Guyanese youth to take photographs that became the basis of a city-wide poster campaign that provoked conversations on domestic violence and sent a clear message: children are the most vulnerable and impressionable witnesses of domestic violence.

Through a USAID grant, the Roadside Baptist Church was able support the establishment of BeMAN - a Men's Forum in Region 6 that aims to increase the awareness of men to attitudinal and behavioral issues and encourage and equip them with knowledge and skills to become agents of change. It is vital to support the inclusion of men and

boys in addressing and preventing violence and changing gender norms and attitudes.

In March, I attended the Guyana's Women Lawyer Association's Domestic Violence Forum, where that organization helped raise awareness and shared perspectives on ways to prevent and respond to domestic violence.

In June, the Embassy joined with the Sonia Noel Foundation for the Creative Arts to host a fashion show to build awareness on domestic violence in Guyana and to support Help and Shelter – a civil society organization that serves as a support network and offers a place of refuge for those victims of abuse.

Over the summer, Ambassador Hardt had the opportunity to attend and speak at the launch of the National Conversation on Domestic Violence, where a number of young people were present and were able to help identify creative ways to reach the whole of society in addressing

this key human rights issue. This August, Ambassador Hardt helped launch the first International Youth Conference against the Contagion of Violence, together with the U.S. Non-Profit organization, Caribbean American Domestic Violence Awareness.

This conference serves as another opportunity to empower the young people of Guyana to speak out and to renew our commitment to free everyone, especially women and children, from the nightmare of sexual violence. It is easy, especially for young people who have experienced or witnessed violence to accept it as “normal.” It is not. While victims are not alone – unfortunately, there are many victims – violence must not be accepted as “just the way it is.”

Shining the light on sexual violence takes courage. It is not easy for victims and families to step forward; and there is often reluctance by others in society to acknowledge the problem. Perpetrators depend on victims’ and society’s silence.

The TELL Campaign with UNICEF confronts this directly and educates people on the law and the penalties; and it educates and

empowers victims to come forward, so that they can be advocates in this effort. I congratulate UNICEF and the government of Guyana for raising this awareness and look forward to continuing and increasing our collaborative efforts to protect the most vulnerable populations

Thank you.